

STATEMENT BY MR. S.K. DAS, ADVISER, MINISTRY OF EARTH SCIENCES AND  
MEMBER OF THE INDIAN DELEGATION, AT EIGHTEENTH MEETING OF THE STATES  
PARTIES TO THE 1982 UNITED NATIONS CONVENTION ON THE LAW OF THE SEA ON  
JUNE 18, 2008

Thank You Mr. President,

At the outset my delegation wishes to thank the Secretary-General for his comprehensive Report on Oceans and the Law of the Sea.

India attaches high importance to the effective functioning of the institutions established under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea and therefore follows closely the work of all subsidiary institutions under the Convention, namely the International Sea-bed Authority, the International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea and the Commission on the Limits of the Continental Shelf.

We congratulate the Chairman of the Commission on the Limits of Continental Shelf for the efforts by the Commission under his leadership in undertaking the considerations of the submissions. We also thank him as well as the Secretariat for providing detailed information on various issues and constraints arising from the increasing workload of the Commission and the anticipated increase in the number of submissions in the coming years. We hope that the issue relating to deadline of submissions will be resolved amicably.

Over the past few years, the international community has focused on issues relating to management of living marine resources, and conservation and management of biological diversity of the sea-bed in areas beyond national jurisdiction. The Ad Hoc Working Group to study issues relating to the conservation and sustainable use of marine biological diversity beyond areas of national jurisdiction had met in May this year. The important issues that were debated related to the setting up of Marine protected Areas in the High Seas and the legal regime governing Marine Genetic Resources in areas beyond national jurisdiction and related issues of access and benefit sharing.

The management and governance of high seas areas presents a formidable challenge for the international community as development of an effective regime for the protection of biodiversity in areas beyond national jurisdiction is seen to be circumscribing some of the traditional high seas freedoms. The challenges of protecting, conserving and ensuring sustainable management of marine biodiversity beyond national jurisdiction are thus enormous.

Mr. President,

The myriad threats to biodiversity in areas beyond national jurisdiction range from open access to fisheries, destructive fishing practices like bottom trawling, pollution from ships and other land based activities, and new threats deriving from bio-prospecting and open ocean iron fertilisation. A combination of measures, including monitoring, scientific investigation, and improved governance are required to prevent or reduce harmful impacts of such activities on biological diversity.

Deep seabed research is still largely the domain of select developed countries. It is imperative that there be increased flow of scientific data and information and transfer of knowledge to developing countries so as to improve their understanding and knowledge of oceans and deep seas, in particular the extent and vulnerability of deep sea biodiversity and ecosystems. We welcome in this regard the setting up of an Endowment Fund by the International Seabed Authority to promote the conduct of marine scientific research in the international seabed Area for the benefit of all mankind by supporting the participation of qualified scientists and technical personnel from developing countries in marine scientific research programmes.

The international seabed authority is now involved in drafting the regulation of polymetallic sulfides. We hope that the issues regarding configuration of blocks and geographic proximity of blocks in the allocated areas for exploration will be successfully resolved. The Secretary General of the International Sea bed Authority reported that an interest in exploring the ocean resources has been expressed by the private sector. This is an encouraging development.

Mr. President,

Overfishing, destructive fishing practices and IUU fishing continue to be great threats to the conservation, management and sustainable use of biodiversity on the high seas. To combat IUU fishing it is essential to give priority to compliance and enforcement measures, including effective Port State measures, listing of vessels, and developing and implementing integrated monitoring, control and surveillance packages. It is important to sustainably manage fish stocks and protect vulnerable marine ecosystems and thus to find a balance between sustainable use and conservation.

India is implementing a dedicated programme on coastal and marine area management. Under this programme, GIS based information system has been developed for 11 identified critical habitats. Other major programs include: Determination of Waste Load Allocation and Waste assimilation capacity at selected estuaries along coastal areas of India, Development of model Integrated Coastal and Marine Area Management (ICMAM) plans for selected sites along the coastline of India, and Development of Guidelines for Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) studies for marine and coastal developmental activities and processes. India also has a dedicated coastal ocean and marine pollution monitoring system which regularly monitors the level of pollutants in coastal sea including the hotspots.

Mr. President,

India is pleased to report the establishment of tsunami Early Warning System for Indian Ocean with a dedicated Tsunami Warning Centre at Hyderabad. This system was set up and operationalised on 15th October, 2007. The Indian Tsunami Early Warning System comprises a real-time network of seismic stations, Bottom Pressure Recorders (BPR) and tide gauges to detect tsunamigenic earthquakes and to monitor tsunamis. The system detects all earthquake events of more than 6 Magnitude occurring in the Indian Ocean in the less than 20 minutes of occurrence. A host of communication methods are employed for timely reception of data from the sensors as well as for dissemination of alerts. A high level of redundancy is being built into the communication system to avoid single point failures with all the necessary computational and communication infrastructure that enables reception of real-time data from all the sensors, analysis of the data, generation and dissemination of tsunami advisories following a standard operating procedure. India is willing to offer Tsunami advisories to all affected countries in the Indian ocean.

Thank You

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